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ABSTRACT

This document summarizes a study attempting to understand the critical skill of creative visioning. In the study, 20 people who were involved in creativity or creative visioning were interviewed for 1.5-4 hours. Seven central themes emerged from the interviews: (1) the meaning of creative visioning; (2) trusting; (3) imagination; (4) connections; (5) intensity; (6) courage; and (7) spiritual/mysticism. These main themes were enriched by a discussion of enablers and blocks. Although creative visioning is not something that can be easily understood or defined, the paper attempts to synthesize a definition from the descriptions gathered in the interviews. The document defines creative visioning as a process that is based in and touches a deep sense of knowing that enables one to see, feel, and sense new possibilities, dimensions, and connections. Key to this sense of knowing was trusting, a need to trust one's ability to know in a different way through intuition. But this trust is more than in intuition. It moved into trusting the body's knowing that included reason, logic, intuition, and something more. Emerging from intuition and perhaps as important came imagination and connections. The sense of knowing that trusts intuition depends on an ability to imagine. This new vision requires intensity and courage. This intensity requires courage. All of the subjects said that fear was the greatest block to creative visioning. The paper includes a brief discussion of the implications of the findings, concluding that schools are key to fostering the growth of creative visioning in students. (DK)

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EDUCATORS LOOK TO THE POETS AND ARTISTS

The Importance of Creative Visioning in Education

Out of a growing sense that creative visioning is a critical skill and ability, a study was done to attempt to understand more fully this important aspect of being human. This article summarizes that study.

An Overview

In the education of young children there is a constant sense of surprise and awe that touches not only the learner but the teacher as well. The ability to be surprised and to make leaps dawns on a child's face with such wonder. A connection is made. No teacher can forget that look when a child makes that kind of a connection; it is a moment of joy. This ability to make connections is a very integral part of being human. It is an important part of living, even into the last years of life. It tragically seems that as we move out of young years of delight the sense is lost in the many realities of adulthood. From a deep sense that this is a critical ability, a study was made of creative visioning (Cromwell, 1988).

Creative visioning is that which enables those leaps and surprises. Like tossed old pennies, there is an abundance of creative visioning in our lives. But like the old pennies they are not appreciated and often not even recognized. With a sense that creative visioning is a shining, sparkling surprise that litters each person's life, a naturalistic inquiry was made by interviewing twenty people in the Seattle area. (The interviews lasted from one and half hours to four hours.) Each in some way and in a unique field was a person involved in creativity or creative visioning. E. Paul Torrance, one of the great pioneers in the field of creativity, stated that this generation would find it impossible to forgive if creativity was not further studied (Torrance and Hall, 1980). He also contended that there was an aspect to creativity that moved beyond logic and reason and that demanded further, far reaching, if not ground breaking studies. The twenty people of this study helped do just that--they discussed creativity as it touched their lives and from that information came a synthesis.

The kernel of the synthesis was a poem and story which attempted to describe the process of creative visioning. The synthesis--a tapestry of creative visioning--was woven together based on the central threads or themes as they emerged from the interviews. They are: meaning of creative visioning, trusting, imagination, connections, intensity, courage and spiritual/mysticism. These main threads were enriched by a discussion of enablers and blocks. In this article these main threads will be discussed, followed by a brief discussion of the implications and hope for the future.

The Definition

At the beginning and interwoven throughout the interviews the first issue to understanding the themes emerged. It was the meaning of creative visioning. Strongly present in the literature and even more powerfully in the stories and words of the twenty interviewed, came the sense that creative visioning was critically important for every person and even to "the future of the world." This cry came from them intensely and spoke not only of their experiences but of their longing. As strange as it sounds, in the midst of this intense call for and statement of the need, creative visioning was not so easily defined. Adding their voices to those of the researchers and experts on creativity there was difficulty in defining the unknown and unknowable; it was very hard to put creative visioning in a box. That it exists and is most important loudly came through the interviews. In light of the fact that it may not fit any box, a distilled, synthesized description of creative visioning would seem to be that it is a process that is based in and touches a deep sense of knowing that enables one to see, feel, sense new possibilities, dimensions and connections. This sense of a process and hope was much present in the interviews and was woven into the fabric of the description of the process throughout the talks.

The Threads of the Tapestry of Creative Visioning

Flowing from this sense, and not a boxed definition of the process of creative visioning, came the remaining threads or themes. They emerged and became clearer as each interview progressed and were clearest in the artistic expression woven in wonder and awe. Key to this sense of knowing was a thread called trusting. It touched into the great need to trust self--especially to trust one's ability to know in a different way through intuition.

And yet, this trust was more than in intuition; it was in a sense of knowing that included intuition but moved beyond intuition and logic. It moved into trusting the body's knowing that included reason, logic, intuition and something more--not easily put in a box or into words. What was clear in the interviews was that trusting this sense of knowing was key to the process of creative visioning.

Emerging from intuition and perhaps as important came the threads of imagination and connections. The sense of knowing which trusts intuition depends on an ability to imagine. It is a thread that calls to existence and pulls together play, pretending, visioning and the ability to see, feel, and sense in the mind's eye new possibilities or connections. This touching of intuition and imagination easily led to the thread of connections. All spoke of the importance to make connections to see relationships. It is through wondering and using the imagination that new relationships and new connections are made that enable new visions to be seen.

The new vision brings the person to the edge and moves the person to a place frequently at odds with the norm. This brings up the next threads which were intensity and courage. This being on the edge seemed to bring about an intensity of life that was seen in a person much involved in life and actively seeking new edges, new visions, new connections. This activity called for great risk taking and demanded personal courage. All said that fear was the greatest block to creative visioning. This reiterated the need for courage. It is a courage sometimes unnoticed and quiet and at other times loudly spoken, but always it is a courage to be different, to be at odds, and sometimes be ridiculed. It takes a great courage to be alone with a vision and new connections--it takes courage to move to new heights as yet

unseen by others. It is a courage that demands to be touchingly and powerfully admired and nurtured. It demands the same admiration as the courage of a mother to raise a child. All those interviewed spoke powerfully of this trait--courage.

This sense of knowing that enables the process of creative visioning touches intuition and imagination and demands trust, intensity and courage. It flows from a deeply centered touching that enables the person to see new possibilities and connections. This deeply centered sense leads to the final thread or theme--spiritualism/mysticism. This is a shimmering thread that surprises and causes awe. It calls to mind E. Paul Torrance when he spoke of creativity that transcends the boundaries of deliberate rational process--a creativity that communicates an instant sense of oneness with all the parts (Torrance and Hall, 1980). This thread spoke of the spiritual, of a sense of mystery. Clearly not magical, this sense of mystery comes because of the deepness of the knowing involved. Alex Osborn (1953), known as the "father" of the problem solving brainstorming technique and one of the pioneers of this field, called creativity a process as mystical as life itself. As with birth and the mystery of living there was a sense of mystery and awe related by the interviewees. Creative visioning was seen as a process as mystical as life. The deeper one experiences and knows life the more profound the process, the more profound the connection and possibilities that could be seen. This is not magic but a sense and call to descend into the depths of life and self. It is there, touching the core of life, that this ability most gives rise, must take place. It is no wonder that one interviewee called this process "incarnational creativity"--a process of bringing this sense of knowing deeply centered in the person into reality. It is a process that experiences new insights, new

consciousness and new connections. It is a process forever on the edge; it is this edge that so many saw as critical and on which so much hope rests.

It is in this rich tapestry of creative visioning, in this descriptive synthesis, that there was an element tied to this last thread that spoke of a dawning of a newness. It is not yet strong enough to stand on its own, nor defined enough even to have the language necessary to fully describe it. This element of newness touches a wonderful sense of creative visioning which is the sense that it is becoming communal and relational. This may well become the most important insight of this study. Mutuality, communalism and collective consciousness are hinted at in some fields and disciplines. The call for collaboration in education, quality circles, team management, common missions in business and leadership touch this sense of community. This call and sense of a shift can be seen in the discussions of Belenky's (1986) and Gilligan's (1982) works. They are not only breaking new ground but stress mutuality, connectiveness, and an ethic of caring that is clearly tied to this same sense of community found in discussions regarding creative visioning. The sense of something new was present--a sense of a collective, relational creative visioning and as one interviewee stated, a new paradigm is coming. This new element enmeshed in this thread of the spiritualism/mysticism as part of creative visioning was an intriguing glimpse--perhaps it is the dawning of a new day.

The dance of creative visioning came to life in this study, especially in the interviews. Emerging from this study came seven central themes or threads that helped form a rich tapestry and description that touches the deepest sense of being. The many shining pennies sparkled and spoke and words came together from twenty and formed the threads. In the wonder

and intensity of the central themes came an even more intense call for the support and nurturing of creative visioning in every place and in every walk of life. It is a most critical aspect of life.

The Needed Implications

A bright light was focused by the twenty people of this study intensely centered on the importance of creative visioning. The implications are simple and in their simplicity represent a profound reality. Creative visioning is needed--the implication is that everyone needs to do all to nurture and support it in self first and then in others.

Sounded from many fields and disciplines, creativity is needed. From the people interviewed this need moved beyond expanding the basics, broadening the scope of a field or discovering new insights; it moved to an understanding of the need for creative visioning for the very existence of the world, for a growing collective dawning creative biosphere, for an emerging communal sense of creating together, and for a deepening of the sense of touching the most profound part of creativity--the sacred. From the twenty voices rose one strong voice yearning for support. The support called for an open system that is flexible and relaxed where discoveries and delight are encouraged and praised. It is a system not bound by rules nor boxed in but that helps develop the self discipline, skills and familiarity with history that will enable the connections to be made. The call is said, sometimes yelled but most often whispered; praised but not supported. For as indicated in the words of some of those interviewed, there is fear of the change a real answer to the call would evoke. To hear this and not to understand the need for everyone to become supportive and not be frozen into acceptance of the status quo is to resist and neglect their collective voice.

Beyond this implication that is personal and universal, there is a specific implication for leaders and especially schools. For leaders, it is to take chances to create and help create environments where mutuality and collective creative visioning can exist. With some bitterness were administrators discussed in the interviews, not with hatred but because they would not see, would not hear, would not sense the knowing, and so did not become models of risk taking based in a vision. Leaders are called to vision and to help bring about new and better realities. This can only be done in touch with their own ability to creatively vision and in support of this ability in others. The implication from this study is simple; leaders need to be creative visioning people who support and develop this ability in self and others.

If the existence of the world, if the deepest kind of knowing is involved, if the most profound sense of touching with the core of life is involved, then creative visioning must be supported, nurtured and developed in schools. At the very least schools should not cause the bitterness cited in the words of some of those interviewed. They spoke painfully of blocks encountered often in schools. It would be good to eliminate the blocks. However, it would be so much better for educational institutions to become proactive in their support of this ability and process. How nice to begin to hear I am an artist because of school, rather than in spite of it. This means risks. It means institutions moving into "ambiguous" places and not being able to have all the answers. Mistakes will be made, but so will growth. If fear is allowed to block them, educational institutions will be the same as they have been, maybe even sharper but still producing bitterness, tears and rage. For schools, for educational institutions, the message is to listen to the creative visioning of

individuals and move to develop, support and nurture individual and then collective creative visioning.

There is hope--perhaps the challenge will be accepted. Each person needs to celebrate and nurture creative visioning. The importance for leaders to do this seems self-evident. As institutions, schools touch and help form so many people. This critical need of creative visioning must be nurtured and supported within our schools. The call is being sounded. The question now is who will answer.

The Future

E. Paul Torrance states there is no stalling, delay or denial of the existence of creativity that transcends the boundaries of a rational process and that the need to explore and study this aspect of the human being will be demanded by coming generations. This study adds to that statement. There is much need to further study creative visioning. But as this area moves beyond the rational, the study needs not be boxed in by the "arid" academic world. Much knowledge has been gained through linear academic studies of creativity . Using that knowledge and adding to it, this area of study must not be limited to analytic linear methods of quantitative studies but must include the synthetic, holistic methods of naturalistic inquiry. This subject is too important and demands risk be taken--even in the study process.

More study seems evident--the form of which is not so clear. The issue is that it does not need to be clear. What needs to be done is to nurture, support and develop creative visioning as it is studied. The box, the form of the study, is not critical. What is critical is that risks are taken

to expand the deepest sense of knowing and to help others to understand, recognize, accept and nurture creative visioning.

On a personal basis, a recommendation for all is to touch creative visioning. Even on a smaller scale (e.g. one person interviewing another) there is a sense it would be of great value. Much was discerned and has been shared but even more was experienced by the researcher. As one interviewee said, it is one thing to speak of water and another to be wet. For personal growth and a personal touch of creative visioning the process of sharing and discussing and experiencing creative visioning is of great value.

Beyond the reiteration for further study and for a personal touching with creative visioning comes recommendations for leaders and schools. The call for creative leaders is great. They need to be risk takers who help create environments that support and nurture creative visioning. Structure, perhaps needed, should not be so rigid as to prevent new discoveries, new answers, new connections--creative visioning. Leaders need to trust this ability in themselves and help others trust this knowing that comes from deep in self. Leaders need to help prevent environments of criticism, rigidity and fear--all blocks to creative visioning. Perhaps most important, leaders need to become creative visioning people who in trusting that in themselves will do all that is possible to ensure that conditions for others are helpful, supportive and nurturing of this most critical ability.

Finally, the recommendations move to schools, perhaps the most important place in regards to nurturing and support. Schools (all educational institutions) need to create environments that promote, support, nurture and celebrate creative visioning. They need to provide those first encounters and ongoing connections to all sorts of creativity--

music, art, painting, drama, dance, poetry, fairy tales, pretend, games and more. In an environment constantly touched by creativity, schools need to promote risk taking, imagination expanding activities and a climate of openness. In a place where it is all right to make mistakes, new discoveries and delights can more easily happen. In a place where many answers are possible, new connections can more easily happen. In a place where creative visioning is supported, nurtured and celebrated, creative visioning can more easily happen. Schools are key. They are places that so easily can nurture and help develop this ability in so many. Teachers and administrators (teachers with students and administrators with staff and students) need to create an environment free of fear; structured but not rigid; tied to history but not chained to one answer; open to new discoveries, connections and delights; respectful of the individual but aware of a communal aspect of being; touched by the arts, creativity, imagination and the dance of life; filled with a joy and zest for life and learning that promotes risk taking and develops courage to see differently; and ready to be receptive to the wonder and awe of the dance and the spiritual/mystical connections so much a part of creative visioning. Creative visioning is critical and individuals, administrators, leaders, and schools (educational institutions) need to do all that is possible to promote, nurture, develop and celebrate this most critical ability.

A child flies a kite and sees a dance and makes connections. In the quiet of a special place a deep sense of knowing can come that sees the dance of life and makes the connections. From the child learning, making connections, taking leaps--from creative visioning can come a rich picture of the dance.

I listened . . .

and the dance was heard

deeply, deeply . .

and the wonder grew.

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